

## National Insight: Pragmatism: Proof is in the Results

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### **ABSTRACT**

In pragmatic philosophy the consequences of actions determine the moral goodness and evil of the causing actions. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century pragmatism has been the central philosophy in America, this includes our schools. Most of our schools are results driven. For these schools, only the data and results are important. The purpose of this essay is to focus on pragmatism and the details of why this philosophy is aligned with the author's beliefs.

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Human beings must have a way of systematically responding to the events and situations that surround them. Kritsonis (2002) points out that humans use philosophy as "an attempt to think speculatively, reflectively, and systematically about the universe and the relationship to the universe". Although every being may hold a unique philosophical view, I tend to agree with the pragmatic philosophers. Pragmatists say that life is a process of discovering the truths of how our actions work for us. This philosophy focuses on the practical application of knowledge (Kritsonis, 2002).

The purpose of this essay is to discuss and explore my educational philosophy of pragmatism. The study of philosophy helps educators focus on questions that are

speculative, prescriptive and analytical (Kritsonis, 2002). When studying philosophy, educators are challenged to think and self-evaluate. My personal explorations have led me to deal with personal reality and to better understand my own philosophy of education.

### **Major Philosophies**

Kritsonis (2002) identifies four major philosophies. These are: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism. Although I believe that elements of each of these philosophies are used in our schools, I hold the Pragmatic view as the most applicable.

Development of the mind and self is most critical when dealing with the educational philosophy of Idealism. This school of thought holds that students should leave schools as cultivated individuals and they should be thinking individuals who are ruled by thought. Although there has been a push for the Idealist thought character education and ethics, the greatest emphasis is still not thought but on results instead.

Realism in education is most aligned with scientific thought. I believe that this philosophy totally goes against the grain of personalizing the educational process. Although we are all affected by our reality, educators must take a practical approach in understanding our students and building relationships. It is imperative to get our students involved in critical thinking and metaphysical study.

The Existentialists believe that teachers should treat the learning process as an experienced based activity. This type of learning is definitely active and students are engaged. Because of the sheer number of students in our classrooms, we are not able to give each and every student what they need as determined by the Existentialist philosophy.

### **Pragmatism**

My personal motivation in teaching is to give students what they need and what would be most valuable to them as they move throughout life. Pragmatism is the one philosophy from the four schools that offers this component. I believe that pragmatism combines logic, epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology.

Pragmatism comes from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning action. Words like practical derive from *pragma*. Pragmatism looks away from principles, but instead looks toward experience, results, and consequences. In order to fully appreciate a consequence, one must first reflect on the epistemology of the situation, or realize how they got there. At that point axiology becomes important because the value of the results must be weighed. To completely understand the experience, one must then metaphysically perceive their reality. When this is done, within the bounds of the pragmatic philosophy, experience is gained and knowledge is learned.

Educators must take a practical approach to teaching and must critically reflect on what our students are learning. We must make an attempt to teach students the knowledge of ethical values that are essential to their needs as they function in the world. It is indeed practical to teach the student that which is right and wrong. We want them to be productive citizens. It is foundationally and practically imperative to teach our

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students the value of aesthetics and metaphysics. It is critical that we produce students who are balanced, whole, and able to express themselves.

In conclusion, pragmatism takes every frame of philosophical thought and combines these into a user-friendly mold that can be used to teach and develop our students into complete persons who are prepared to move forward in our world. Educators must continue to reflect and discover truths and implore those truths to those students who need to know. Educators must be willing to be honest as they deal with the consequences of past actions and the present results that face us. We must look at those students that we were not able to reach and be willing to ask ourselves why and if a more practical approach would have yielded better results.

**Reference**

Kritsonis, W. A. (2002). *William Kritsonis, PhD on Schooling*. Ashland, OH: Bookmasters, Inc.

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